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**Changing Women's Roles in Homestead Management:
Mainstreaming Women in Rural Development**

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Thelma R Paris
Alamgir Chowdhury
Manik Lal Bose

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Centre for Policy Dialogue

House No 40/C, Road No 11 (new), Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209
Mailing Address: GPO Box 2129, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
Tel: (880 2) 8124770, 9141703. 9141734; Fax: (880 2) 8130951
E-mail: cpd@bdonline.com; Website: www.cpd-bangladesh.org

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The present paper, **Changing Women's Role in Homestead Management: Mainstreaming Women in Rural Development**, has been prepared as part of CPD's on-going agricultural policy research and advocacy activities with the International Rice research Institute (IRRI) under the Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project.

The present paper titled *Changing Women's Role in Homestead Management: Mainstreaming Women in Rural Development* has been prepared by *Dr Thelma R Paris*, Gender Specialist, Social Sciences Division, *Dr Manik Lal Bose*, Project Scientist, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Manila, Philippines and *Mr Alamgir Chowdhury*, Director, Socio-consult Ltd., Dhaka. The paper was presented at the CPD organised dialogue on ***Women's Contribution to Rural Economic Activities :Making the Invisible Visible*** held on April 22, 2004 at BRAC Centre INN Auditorium, Dhaka.

Assistant Editor: *Anisatul Fatema Yousuf*, Head (Dialogue & Communication), CPD
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CHANGING WOMEN'S ROLES IN HOMESTEAD MANAGEMENT: MAINSTREAMING WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

Until the 70s, researchers on rural Bangladesh had completely ignored women, and their important economic contribution in the national economy. However since the 80s a plethora of studies have been conducted on women's involvement in homestead production (Abdullah 1983; Abdullah 1985; Begum 1985; Halim and McCarthy 1985; Hussain et.al, 1988). These studies revealed that the invisibility of women farmers from official agricultural statistics and from agricultural policies and programs is primarily due to the deeply embedded social and cultural norms in patriarchy ("a set of social relations with a material based which enables men to dominate women") and *purdah* which prescribes seclusion of women, including severe restrictions on women's movements outside their *bari*. Women are not to be seen by men outside their immediate family, and they are hence not supposed to be visible or be involved in field agriculture nor to be going to public places such as markets. Thus, for long their work and other activities even their existence – remained "invisible" to researchers. Another reason is that women's expenditure saving activities within the homesteads such as post harvest, raising seedlings, fisheries, livestock raising and tree planting were perceived to be extension of their household responsibilities and not classified as "economic" and as part of agriculture (Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989). Women tend to specialize in work within or near their homestead while men usually work outside the homestead such as field agriculture, trading, marketing, etc. Women thus play vital roles in the production sector of rural economy although these activities are not recognized or accounted for as an "economically active work" nor are they remunerated for their work (Abdullah, 1985, Asaduzzaman and Westergaard 1993).

The proliferation of non-government organizations (NGOs) operating largely in the rural areas has improved women's access to social organizations and networks in Bangladesh (Hamid,1996). NGOs have focused their programs on empowering women by increasing the productivity and income of the activities within the homestead. Studies on the Grameen Bank project in Bangladesh demonstrate that poor women are capable of handling credit to improve their income through self employment (Rahman 1986; Hossain 1988). Available data show that by providing poor women with

financial capital empower them to enjoy the fruits of their own labor than is the case of women employed by others as female laborers, e.g. rice husking (Mahmud 2003). Women who benefited from Grameen Bank are more mobile and have more confidence and awareness, not only in the *bari* but in the world outside of it. They used their power over the household budget to make sure that their children are healthier, better educated and likely to lead easier lives than they have themselves (Todd 1996). While NGOs have focused on empowering women through microfinance, efforts to address and mainstream women's concerns in governments' agricultural research and extension programs are still lacking.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) generated data in 2000-2001 on gender roles in economic activities in Bangladesh through time budgets for a nationally representative sample of 62 villages which was set up in 1987 for analyzing rural poverty trends. The time budgets provided a comprehensive picture on women's participation in relation to men on economic activities and its impact on the well-being of the household and women's empowerment (Hossain and Bose, 2004). The findings also show that women from low-income households are more heavily involved in economic activities mostly around homestead-based production. To complement the quantitative data from the sample household surveys, IRRI also conducted Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) to obtain qualitative information to obtain greater insights into changing roles of women in domestic labor and homestead production. Data were generated on women's control of resources, perceptions on how women value themselves and changes in women's status and desires to improve their economic conditions. Social issues were better expressed and understood through informal discussions which cannot be gleaned through quantitative surveys.

This paper presents the result of the focus group discussions with men and women as a supplement to the quantitative information gathered from household surveys as presented in the paper by Hossain and Bose (2004).

2. Methodology

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted separately with men and women belonging to poor and non-poor households in 8 villages out of the 62 villages from 57 districts included in the quantitative study. The facilitators stayed in the village and walked through the village to familiarize themselves with the landscape, resources and

people. A few of the facilitators were already known in the village because they were the same enumerators of the large household surveys of the same study. Thus rapport was established first. Interaction with the village leaders was developed prior to conducting the FGD. Most of the FGDs were facilitated by four young trained field socio-economists. Out of four, two were females and two were males. In addition, local female village assistants were also active in organizing these FGDs. The local assistants and the facilitators visited the households door to door to inform them about FGD and made an appointment considering the time availability of women who had to finish their household chores first. Flip charts, cards and local materials like seeds were used in eliciting farmers' opinion. The villagers supplied jute mats for sitting arrangements. The group sat in a circular way to face each other. In the FGDs for men, a few women were assembled to listen and watch. They were curious because it was the first time that such discussions on female roles, status, and empowerment issues were openly raised and discussed. Some men also stood around and listened and often tried to interrupt. However, the facilitators used the gate keeping method to stop them since separate meetings were organized for them. After the FGDs in the village, a short discussion was also conducted with key informants (men and women) to validate and triangulate more information. All the meetings were lively and enjoyed by the participants and sustaining the group's interest in long meetings was not a problem.

The facilitators observed that except in few cases (decision on who keeps and control the money) the responses for similar questions were the same. Separate FGDs were found useful in view of the social restriction (purdah) and to avoid the domination of the men in the discussions. We found that women could speak without hesitation when male in-laws were not around. The elderly women were more knowledgeable while the younger females were outspoken and inquisitive about the issues and discussions.

One of the PRA tools used was gender analysis. Gender analysis starts with a series of questions related to "who". Who often does in this activity? Who has access to specific resources? Who owns resources and who makes decisions (control) in the use of this resource? Who makes decisions in specific household, family and farm related aspects?

There were about 10-15 people in each group who participated in the FGDs. Of the total number of participants, 75% belong to 20 to 35 year age group and the rest are

over 35 years old. Muslims dominated the participants, except in villages with substantial non-Muslim population. Some of the participants were also members of NGOs groups providing micro credit. In some areas we found female elected Union Prarishad members who served as key informants and helped in organizing the FGD meetings.

There was strong interaction from the poor category especially involved in direct income generating activities outside the homestead. The topic on women's ownership sparked discussion because women realized that they seldom get opportunity to gender inequality which is an integral part of their life. Seasonality issues raised a can of worms because it brought into fore the difficulties faced by women during times of scarcity and revealed their vulnerability more than their male counterparts. One striking issue was the inequality in the access to government services such as the extension services, access to police to address the law and order situation in the villages. In most cases they expressed their satisfaction with the provision of health services (family planning, child nutrition, preventive medicine).

3. The homestead subcomponent of the farming and livelihood systems

Homestead refers to home and adjoining land occupied by a family while the homestead management includes such activities such as managing homestead area for production purposes, health and nutrition, sanitation and home up-keeping, home management including all aspects of life and general welfare for all the members of farming families (Ninez 1984). Thus homestead production and management system can be defined as a sub-system of the farming (crop, livestock, agroforestry, fisheries) and livelihood systems (off-farm and non-farm) of a farming community. Women's contribution in the homestead production has to be examined in relation to men and as an integral part of this system (Hannan 1986; Lightfoot et.al., 1991). By doing so, women's issues can be better articulated as an integral part of research on rural development. Such an approach, would, among other things, give a better analytical framework for policy interventions which can reduce poverty and improve the low status of poor women in the rural sector.

The household is not a homogenous production and consumption unit. Rather within a household, men and women have different roles and responsibilities as well as shared and sometime conflicting interests. Women in homestead production are not a

homogenous group. Their domestic and homestead production roles are not only determined by cultural factors but also by socioeconomic status particularly accessibility to means of production market, technology, extension services and income generating activities. Literature review earlier has shown that women under the pressure of poverty, separation or withdrawal of support from men in the particular frame of her social role (mother, wife, daughter) are compelled to engage in wage labor in case of marginal and landless households.

The biophysical environment affects the type of farming and livelihood systems that families have. It is the farm household and its members who decide on how to allocate their land, labor, skills, knowledge according to the gender roles and gender relations which in turn are dictated by social and cultural norms. Thus the external factors affect the response of family members within a household, and in turn will affect the adoption of agricultural, extension and development programs. The factors which affect women's participation (labor, decision-making, income, expenditure saving) and empowerment are due to social, economic and political structures which generate norms and practices of women's subordination to men, the consequences of which are women's relative lack of choice and agency in decision and processes that shape their welfare (Mahmud 2003). White (1992) stressed that placing women within the context of intra-household relationships provides a better approach to the study of women than do studies focusing merely on women.

4. Gender roles in homestead agriculture

Homestead management

The daily household management is mainly women's job. Women fetch water, clean the huts, stalls, and homesteads; wash the dishes and utensils; cook and serve meals. They scavenge for timber wood and other fuel. When cow dung is available, women collect it, mould it into cakes or around sticks, and set it out to dry. They also compost small droppings and waste and collect ash for replenishing the fields. Whereas men construct the huts and thatch the roofs, women repair and maintain the huts. The mud floors must be resurfaced often, and the entire hut requires major repairs before and after the monsoon rains (Chen 1986). Rahman (1991) calculated the value of all expenditure saving activities as 20% of the total household income of landless families. His calculations include expenditure saving activities such as gathering

sticks, leaves and dung for fuel, and growing or gathering vegetables and fruit which are mainly done by women.

The findings of the FGD on gender division of labor in household management are reported in **Table1**. Children are women's domains: feeding, tending, bathing, supervising and them putting to bed. Aside from these chores, mothers are also mainly responsible for preparing their children to school as well as tutoring them (when they are literate), caring for the sick and the older family members, and attending to husbands' needs. When male laborers are hired to work alongside with their husbands, women get up earlier to prepare food for the laborers.

Table1. Gender division of labor in household maintenance, child/family care responsibilities, findings from focus group meetings, 2002.

Activities	Poor	Non- Poor
Household management		
Cleaning the house	Women only	Women only
Washing utensils and clothes	Women only	Women only
Cooking	Women only	Women only
Applying water with cow dung on the floor and walls	Women only	Women; hired women also
Purchasing materials for home from village traders	Women only	Women only
Fetching drinking & cooking water	Women more than men	Women more than men
Collecting sticks fuel for cooking	Women more than men	Women more than men
Making cow dung sticks for fuel	Women only	Women; hired women also
Child/family care		
Sending children to school	Both	Both
Tutoring /giving lessons to children	Both	Both
Child and health care	Women only	Women only
Nursing sick family members	Both; W more than men	Both
Caring for older family members	Women only	Women more than men
Social activities		
Attend meetings organized by NGOs	Women only	
Marketing outside the village	Men only	Men only

For all areas of production and for all commodities, marketing is solely the domain of men. Men do all the shopping for household necessities and more critically, do all the

major marketing of the household's agricultural and non-agricultural products. Women can exert some control over the income from small-scale trade through the children within the village or at the marketplace, but men carry out all large-scale trade. The situation has not changed much over time as the same division of labor was observed by Chen (1986) nearly two decades ago.

Rice processing, grain storage, and seed selection

A large volume of literature on women's work in rural Bangladesh focuses on women's involvement in rice processing activities (Abdullah 1985; Begum 1985; Halim and McCarthy 1985). But this area has been traditionally offering employment and income to the female members of the marginal farmers, share croppers, and landless as well as female-headed poor families.

Post harvest activities include seed selection and preservation, parboiling, drying, winnowing, threshing, etc. and these activities are not only confined to paddy processing work, but also all other major crops like wheat, pulses, oilseeds and spices (Islam 1986). A few women from non-poor households hire other poor women in rice processing activities which are tedious and time consuming. McCarthy et.al. (1981) observed that seasonality, irregularity in wages and income were the problems affecting women wage laborers. Technical innovation and adoption of new technology in post harvest also pushed women to compete with men in the labor market. In the focus group meeting we noted substantial changes in this area (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Gender division of labor in crop based activities done within the homestead

Activity	Poor	Non-Poor
Winnowing rice	Women only	Women; hired women also
Threshing paddy (manual)	Women more than men	Women; hired women also
Threshing paddy (machine)	Men only	Men only
Threshing wheat	Men only	Men only
Drying crops	Women more than men	Women; Hired women also
Husking paddy (manual).	Women more than men	Women; Hired women also
Boiling paddy	Women only	Women; Hired women also
Seed management and storage	Women	Women

Livestock management

Women take responsibility of feeding, rearing goats and poultry birds such as, chickens and ducks. Cleaning the sheds for cows and goats are women's responsibility, while feeding and giving water to the animals at day time are shared by women and children as well. Women also prepare common poultry feed such as rice bran, food scraps, broken paddy or rice and crushed snails. Poultry meat and eggs are produced both for home consumption as well for sale. Selling of eggs and poultry is generally carried out by women when the deals are made with well-to-do neighbors. But men do the marketing outside the village.

Homestead forestry

Poor families grow trees primarily for fuel, poles or fruits for consumption or sale. In most homesteads where bamboos are grown, women use these bamboo materials for making fish cage, baskets, fan and mats. Both men and women plant trees while women work more than men in growing saplings.

Vegetable gardening

In rural Bangladesh, it is a common sight that plant beans and other vegetable like squash climb up the roofs and trees requiring no land space. At present seasonal

vegetables are grown e.g. bean, bottle gourd, sweet pumpkin, etc. in adjoining land of the house. Cultivation of other vegetables like lalshak, spinach, spring beans, eggplant, cucumber in the homestead land is now a major expenditure saving activity that allow rural households consumption of vegetables throughout the year. Some households even earn some income by selling the surplus. Women are more heavily involved in vegetable gardening. than men. The task of land preparation, sowing/planting, watering and harvesting of homestead garden crops are mostly done by women and children.

The findings of the FGDs show that gender roles in homestead agricultural production (livestock management, tree production, and vegetable gardening) have not changed much among the poor and non-poor households (**Table 3**).

Table3. Gender division in homestead livestock activities by socio-economic groups

Activities	Poor	Non-poor
Livestock management		
Cleaning animal shed	Women only	Women; Hired women also
Rearing ducks and chickens	Women only	Women
Rearing goats	Women only	Both
Raising cattle	Both	Both
Collecting animal fodder from outside	Men	Men
Feeding animals	Women and children more than men	Women more than men; Hired men/women also
Tree production		
Planting trees in the homestead	Both	Both
Raising tree saplings	Women more than men	Women more than men
Vegetable production		
Raising vegetable nurseries	Women more than men	Women more than men
Cultivating vegetables	Women more than	Women more than men

	men	
Fish production		
Raising fish in the ponds	Both	Both
Fishing in ponds	Both	Both

Non-farm activities

During the lean periods of the year, women are engaged in non-farm expenditure-saving activities such as making mats, stitching quilts, making fish nets, doing handicrafts, making clothes by hand, making earthen oven for parboiling rice. Only gathering house-building materials and repairing the house are mainly male activities (Table 4).

Table4. Gender division of labor in expenditure saving activities, socio-economic groups

Activity	Who often does
Making mats	Women only
Stitching kantha (quilts)	Women only
Making fish nets	Women more than men
Handicrafts (embroidery, fans, making fish cage)	Women only
Making bamboo/cane crafts	Men and women
Making earthen oven for parboiling rice	Women only
Making clothes by hand	Women only
Gathering sticks for fuel	Women
Repairing the house	Men
Gathering house building materials	Men

5. Women's perceptions of changes in living and work environment

The findings of the FGDs show that the levels of living of the women from poor has improved but not so for the women from the non-poor households. Below are women's perceptions of changes in their work environments over the last ten years.

a) Greater contribution in economic activities not only within the homesteads but also outside. More poor women are now employed outside the villages in the fieldwork for crop cultivation. The social norms are weakening partly because of the mobilization of women by NGOs for organizing economic activities with micro-credit. Women from poor households are heavily involved in earth moving, construction work, road

maintenance, and crop production. The experience of IRRI-PETRRA project is that women are enthusiastic in participating in the farmer-participatory research for technology validation which requires fieldwork.

b) Increase in cultivation of vegetables. The cultivation of vegetables has increased along with the increase in the size of population. At present the women are more involved in growing vegetables than men. NGOs often work with men in supplying improved seeds and extending the knowledge on improved management practices. The men are however involved in the marketing of vegetables.

c) Reduction in participation in paddy husking and other low-productive cottage industries. In the past the women used to husk paddy by dheki (indigenous husking device). Many women from extreme poor households used to work as hired labor in paddy husking for middle and large farm households in exchange for rice by-products like broken rice and husks. Paddy husking by dheki was the major rural processing activity in Bangladesh earlier (BIDS 1981). However, women's labor in this backbreaking activity has almost been eliminated due to the introduction of commercial rice mills in almost every village which are operated by men. Some poor women now find employment in rice mills for drying paddy and managing rice byproducts. As farm households now get the paddy processed by commercial mills, women from these households no longer have to get up very early in the mornings. It has been an important source of improvement in their living conditions.

d) Increasing commercialization of poultry farming and goat rearing. Previously, rearing of ducks and chickens which were dominated by women, were not considered as important sources of income. At present, it has become an attractive enterprise and men also participate in this activity. The selling of the poultry birds and eggs is an important source of cash for meeting daily expenses, and sale of goats helps overcoming financial crisis. Selling of eggs is an important source making weekly installments of NGO credit for activities that does not generate regular income such as cattle fattening.

e) Reduction in labor allocation for animal husbandry. With the spread of power tillers and threshing machines, the number of cattle kept for providing draft power in crop cultivation has been on the wane. This has substantially reduced women's activities for feeding and caring cattle, collecting dung and preparing dung cake as

fuel for the rainy season. With increasing proportion of girls having educated in secondary schools, the supply of women labor for these “nasty” jobs has also been declining. This trend however has had an adverse effect on the supply of fuel and have increased work burden of women in planting trees, and collecting firewood.

- f) *New enterprise such as tailoring.* In the past only men earned income through tailoring. At present, more women are purchasing sewing machines by taking loan (money) from different NGO samities (societies). This has helped empower women to engage in a business enterprise and earn cash incomes.
- g) *Changing role of women in economic activities.* Migration of men to urban areas and abroad in search of better earning jobs is on the increase. There is also an increasing trend of mobility from farm to non-farm jobs within rural areas with improvement of roads and development of growth centers. In response women’s roles are beginning to shift from being unpaid family workers to *de facto* farm managers in cases when men are absent.
- h) *Changing attitude towards girl education.* More mothers now want their daughters to go to school. They realize the value of education as a step out of poverty and tedious long hours of work for home maintenance. Free education and scholarships in secondary schools for girls has facilitated this process.
- i) *More self-confidence and recognition.* Unlike earlier times when women were afraid to talk to strangers and express themselves in public, now more women are outspoken and confident to share their feelings, sentiments and ideas in the public.
- j) *Men giving time to take care of children.* Husbands particularly from non-poor households allocate some time to take care of children although it still remains the major task for the wives.

6. Empirical evidences on women’s participation in homestead activities

Table 5 to **6** provides quantitative information obtained from the sample household surveys on changes in market participation of women in various economic activities which support the qualitative observations made above. The share in paid hours for cultivation increased but declined in post harvest work. This indicates the increasing participation of women as wage laborers. The time spent by female unpaid labor also declined in post harvest work due to the introduction of commercial mills for paddy

which has reduced women's labor in dehusking paddy with the use of "dheki". Female family members benefit from labor saving technologies because of the reduction in time, drudgery and workburden as explained earlier.

Table5. Share (%) of market labor supply, earnings and unpaid labor use for women members, 1987 and 2000

Activity	Sold economic hours				Unpaid economic and non-economic hours	
	Paid hours		Income share			
	1987	2000	1987	2000	1987	2000
Cultivation	9.13	44.49	8.18	24.57	1.30	1.05
Post-harvest work	25.32	1.45	15.63	0.78	2.85	0.50
Fisheries	0.00	2.54	0.00	1.49	0.11	0.13
Livestock/poultry rearing	0.38	0.05	0.33	0.01	5.79	7.56
Homestead gardening	0.19	0.35	0.20	0.29	0.96	1.27
Cottage & industrial labor	8.60	2.69	5.07	4.56	1.62	0.48
Business and trades	2.77	--	1.60	--	0.06	0.18
Construction work	11.56	4.39	9.32	2.70	0.40	--
Non-farm services	17.01	42.14	14.13	65.10	3.70	3.04
Domestic activities	25.04	1.90	45.53	0.50	61.45	55.29
Recreation/social works	--	--	--	--	2.19	4.79
Self-services & others	--	--	--	--	19.58	25.72
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.00	100.0
	0	0	0	0		0

Note: Information presented in the table is based on recording of 4-days activities of adult members.

Source: IRRI-BIDS survey.

The share of the economic activities around the homestead in total household income can be seen in **Table 6**. The income share from homestead for landowning household is about 16% of their total household income but for those who do not own any land, the share is about 10%.

Table 6. Average income from homestead and share of total household income by land occupancy groups, 1987 and 2000

Land occupancy group	Homestead crops, fruits and forestry (US\$/hh/Yr)		Livestock, poultry and fisheries (US\$/hh/Yr)		Total homestead income as % of total household income	
	1987	2000	1987	2000	1987	2000
Land ownership group:						
Absolutely landless	3.98	6.49	10.99	33.83	2.9	8.2
Functionally landless	10.61	20.44	27.27	36.14	6.6	7.4
Land owners	26.53	85.73	50.01	190.56	6.1	15.8
Land holding group:						
Non-farm	11.11	36.70	17.83	50.65	4.6	9.4
Up to 0.40 ha	13.73	39.10	32.58	75.21	8.0	12.7
More than 0.40 ha	27.06	83.11	57.23	227.37	6.2	16.2
Land tenancy group:						
Predominantly tenant	15.26	42.67	44.65	167.88	7.8	19.1
Predominantly owner	25.06	75.70	49.95	149.05	6.2	13.4
All households	18.51	51.91	38.05	112.78	6.1	13.4
Farm holdings	22.32	62.61	48.46	156.51	6.5	15.1

Source: IRRI-BIDS survey.

7. Livelihood calendar and gender roles

We also collected information on the seasonality in workload and leisure time to identify women's constraints and opportunities for improvement.

Table 7 shows that in general the months of *Baishak* and *Jaistha* are busy periods of the year when men harvest rice and women take care of post harvest activities within

the homestead. The months of *Bhadra*, *Ashwin* and *Kartik* (mid-August to mid-November) are periods of scarcity in Begumpur. During the lean months, men look for non-farm jobs in the cities for such activities as pulling rickshaws and vans and for working as construction workers. Within the homesteads, they repair the house, engage in vegetable gardening or play cards. On the other hand, women sew torn clothes, stitch *kantha* (indigenous quilt) and make *pati* (indigenous mat) along with other household chores. They take care of poultry birds and trees, visit neighbors' houses and socialize, attend meetings of NGO samity (for those who are members of any samity) and look after children and attend to their husbands. However, In West Kashipur, where *boro* rice has emerged as the dominant rice crops, the months of *Falgun* and *Chaitra* are the period of scarcity. The whole year's food supply and meeting other basic expenditures depend on the harvest of Boro. The peak period for cultivating Boro starts from the month of *Kartik*, thus all the stored paddy gets sold by the months of *Magh*, *Falgun*, and *Chaitra*. Small and marginal farmers who deplete their paddy stocks within this period face serious food crisis. Many NGOs help improve the social and economic status of women belonging to landless and marginal land owning families. But it is the small farm households whose livelihoods are more at stake during these months.

Table 7. Distribution of time on the basis of scope of employment and work schedule

Bangla months of the year	Extent of Business/ Employment (in <i>anas</i>) ¹	Extent of routine work (in <i>anas</i>)	Activities and workload
Baishakh	12	4	Male: Harvesting paddy Female: Parboiling paddy, drying paddy, winnowing paddy etc.
Jaistha	12	4	Male: Harvesting paddy Female: Parboiling paddy, drying paddy, winnowing paddy etc.
Ashar	10	6	Storing of crops.
Shraban	8	8	Male: Working in the field

			Female: Cooking and other homestead tasks
Bhadra	4	12	Both: Lesser crop-related work, collecting animal fodder outside the village; Men look for outside jobs; Repair house Female: Cooking, vegetable gardening, separating jute fiber from stick and drying, doing other household chores; Making handicrafts, quilts.
Ashwin	4	12	Both: Lesser crop-related work, collecting animal fodder, fuel outside the village Female: Cooking, vegetable gardening, separating jute fiber from stick and drying, doing other household chores; Making handicrafts, quilts.
Kartik	4	12	Both: Lesser crop-related work Female: Cooking, vegetable gardening, doing any other household chores; Making handicrafts, quilts, etc.
Agrahayan	16	0	Male: Harvesting paddy Female: Parboiling paddy, drying paddy, winnowing paddy, husking paddy and preserving seed, etc.
Poush	8	8	Male: Harvesting paddy Female: Parboiling paddy, drying paddy, winnowing paddy, husking paddy and preserving seed, etc.
Magh	4	12	Less work for women; make cow dung sticks and other homestead tasks
Falgun	8	8	Drying and storing of wheat and chillies.
Chaitra	6	10	Drying and storing of wheat and chillies.

¹ anas is the reference of 16 ana which is the traditional terms of proportion of counting of money and volume of materials (i.e. 4 anas means 25%).

8. Access to and control of resources

Lack of information about women's access to and control over resources has often led to incorrect assumptions about their likely participation in and benefits from a project.

A gender-based analysis of control of resources can help planners to make correct assumptions so that the existing rights of women, which are often less visible, can be protected and strategies developed to extend women's control. Having access to and control of resources also influence decision-making authority. Because of "purdah" and patriarchy, women have less access to land, productive resources, education, training and extension services and control over assets or income. While all the consumer durable goods such as furniture, radio etc. are owned by both husband and wife, men have more access to and control over farm related assets such as draft animal, equipment and tools. However, women have some ownership rights and control over the income from the sale of goats and poultry and in some instances over a cow. Women said that if separated from their husbands, they do not own anything except for their health, experience, and skills. They have less access to technologies, training and information on improved methods in farming and post harvest activities. The agricultural extension services are mostly composed of male agents and as such tend to channel knowledge and training on improved technology to the male farmers. However, this is changing now as more NGOs and GOs have begun to include women in various agricultural training and extension programs.

9. Participation in decision-making

Farm-related matters. Decisions related to rice production such as what crops to grow in the field and what variety, when to plant, what type and how much fertilizer and insecticides to apply, the time for marketing the produce, whom to hire as laborer and how much to pay etc. are all made by the male head of the family. The husband consults the wife to decide how much of the produce are to kept for family consumption.

All decisions regarding goat and poultry raising are made by both the husband and the wife.

Managing the family budget. It is the men who perform income-earning activities outside the homestead. Women earn from kitchen gardening, poultry rearing and sewing, for which they do not have to go outside the homestead. Men are responsible for spending the money earned by the family. Even when women keep family income, they are not free to spend it as they desire. The wife can spend money on her own only for very minor items like for daily necessities or entertaining a guest. For major

expenditure she must consult the husband. Wives cannot spend a large amount of money without permission of her husband. Some women have however control of the money earned from poultry and goat raising and production of vegetables in the kitchen garden.

Making investments. Both the husband and the wife take initiatives for making investments for household and family related matters. The initiative taken by the wife are related to repairing of the house, daughter's marriage, installation of drinking well etc. as the women remain at home. But her initiative carry little/no value as it is only the husband who makes final decision. Only in a few cases the final decision is made after joint consultation.

Children's education. In a situation where there is a son and a daughter in the family who have to appear at the school final examination but the family cannot afford the cost of examination for both, the male child would get the priority. The reason is that the boy is the permanent member as well as the future earning member of the family and the girl will leave the family after marriage. Usually in the old age or in any case of disabilities the son has the obligation to look after the parents.

Other social concerns. The predominant practice of the dowry system in the marriage of a daughter is a major concern of the poor household. Few marriages take place without a dowry irrespective of financial capabilities of the parents. At present, adult female population is higher than the male population. The family having both the marriageable son and daughter cannot even think of marriage of the son before marrying off the daughter. Moreover, a brother cannot imagine marrying before his sister. Almost all families of this class now have girls with secondary schooling and some are employed in services of one kind or another. Suitable bridegrooms are not easily available. At present the female literacy rate is higher than that of the male, which is one of the reasons for the problem. It makes difficult for a father to marry off his daughter in a family of equal status. If the son of a solvent family is in service or has business, his demand for dowry is high and he wants to marry a girl belonging to a family or of higher status. Many of the marriageable girls have become aged to an extent that it is very difficult to get bridegroom of a higher age which a preference of the parents.

Parents are having difficulty in raising the dowry money (a bicycle, a wrist watch or some cash). The poor parents somehow manage this amount by obtaining credit from NGOs, mortgaging the land or borrowing cash from relatives.

But the middle-income group suffers most from this problem. They have no time to be employed in the labor market after conducting the agricultural work on their own farm. With the income from agriculture they can barely lead a subsistence living. They can neither take assistance (cash or kind) from relatives. Therefore, many parents belonging to this class have aged marriageable daughters.

If the bride has a job or income earning skills (higher education or specialized training) the dowry requirement usually less. So, there is an incentive for the parents to send their daughters to school and to continue for higher education.

10. Perceptions regarding their social status

Women's perceptions

- *Lack of empowerment.* In the situation described above, the wife thinks that she does not have any value in the family and the society. She is often reprimanded on very trivial matters and some of them are even beaten by her husband and in-laws.
- *Perceived traditional gender roles.* Activities done outside the homestead are supposed to be done by men and the homestead activities should be done by the women. When men return from work, women should attend to their needs. However, men should show some respect to the women. To ensure a harmonious relationship within the household, men and women should respect each other.
- *Changing attitudes of women about themselves.* That women are considered to be of less value than the men is a traditional attitude in the Bangladeshi rural society. At present the young women consider themselves to be equal to men. They are now aware of their rights by virtue of attending various meetings in the village organized by NGOs, and the exposure of the outside world due to the spread of television.

Men's perceptions

- *Lack of empowerment.* In times of financial pressure, the husband take the pressure to the wife, often lose his temper leading to domestic violence.
- *Changing attitudes among men.* The participating men in the FGD claimed that equal rights for men and women exist at present. They value the women highly. When they live in harmony, women get equal treatment and respect. At present, the newlywed husbands regard their wives highly. When they become financially stable, they desire to separate from their parent and set up an independent household. The tradition of joint family is gradually breaking up.
- *Changing behavior among women.* Before, the wife was not supposed to talk about her problems with the husband or the in-laws with her friends and neighbors or even with the parents. But nowadays, younger wives are more outspoken and expressive of their feelings. When women were asked why they are willing to work in the fields and learn new methods in farming, their response was “ We told our husbands that we should directly help them in cultivation of crops so that they have two hands to reap home harvests. Of course, still we need credit but perhaps, not so much as we need knowledge” (Bayes, 2003).

11. Current efforts of NGOs in income generating activities in the villages

BRAC, Grameen Bank, a few small local NGOs and other development institutions have focused on improving women's empowerment and income through micro-credit programs. Many of these NGOs have been successful in alleviating the poverty and improving women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Evidences show that micro-credit program participation expands women's access to valuable resources like self-employment and mobility into certain public spaces, like the NGO office and health care units. The positive effect of this expansion on women's initial choice set is, however, limited since women's access to more remunerative wage employment and mobility into the male dominated public sphere is still limited.

NGOs mainly provide loan for purchasing cow, culturing fish, rearing poultry, purchasing rickshaw/van for small trading business. They use the loan for repaying previous loan, repairing of houses, purchasing food and clothes.

12. Mainstreaming women in rural development: Ideas of women

Women were also asked about their constraints and desired opportunities in performing their economic activities and the government's role in improving their social and economic status. The findings are reported in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Constraints, opportunities and options for women's greater contribution to family welfare: women's own perceptions

Constraints	Women's needs and opportunities
Lack of access to high yielding varieties of seeds (rice, vegetables) and lack of skills to produce quality seeds.	Need to have formal and "hands-on" training on seed management including production to post harvest. Need to have access to new seeds (rice, vegetables) as well as seedlings for homestead forestry which they can sell.
Low yields of vegetables due to lack of access to tube wells and modern methods to grow vegetables the year round.	Need access to new seeds, tube wells and training on improved methods of vegetable growing as well as improved marketing facilities to sell vegetables as source of income.
High mortality of poultry birds and lack of capital to invest on poultry raising.	Need access to vaccine within the village to reduce poultry mortality and also training on how to raise improved breeds of poultry including formulation of local feeds. Need capital to increase the number of poultry birds and train some women as para-vat/para-fish. Good experiences in some working areas of BRAC.
Lack of access to credit to raise cattle for fattening and lack of animal fodder within the village and in the field	Increase supply of credit and larger size of loans for cattle fattening. Government program for the production of animal fodder within the homestead and in the field.
Low profits for handicrafts and lack of income generating activities	Formation of cooperative of those engaged in handicrafts production for organizing small scale and provide them access to credit and training on financial management and improved technology.

Low productivity and income from fish culture in homestead ponds	Almost every household has pond/ditch that can be used for culturing fish. It would save the cost of fish consumption in the family and help earn some income. More effective program for culture fishery should be promoted.
Small scale tailoring business but lack of markets.	Need to train women to improve the quality of garments making and organize marketing of household-based garments products.
Low wage rates as wage labor in rice fields and lack of technical know-how	Since women's participation in fieldwork is increasing, their technical knowledge can be enhanced through training on improved farming methods. The demand for their specialized skills can increase if their quality of work and efficiency is improved.

13. Concluding remarks

- i. Stereotype notions that rural women are mere housewives should be discarded and replaced by the recognition that their roles in production and their contributions to family income are crucial for improving the livelihoods of the household. All government development programs must target them as equal partners as men. Indeed, many government assistance should be channeled through women for effectively reaching the entire household
- ii. Women's increasing roles in field activities aside from homestead activities should be addressed and mainstreamed in on-going and future research and extension programs. Efforts are now being made under the DFID funded project on "Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance" (PETRRA) to strengthen the linkages between rice research institutions such as the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Department of Extension and NGOs to mainstream women's concerns into their programs (Paris 2001). Out of the 12,983 participating farmers in 45 sub-project of PETTRA during the Boro season, 41% are women (PETRRA 2003). Success stories have shown that women can be empowered by giving them equal access as men in training and extension programs such as seed management and other improved

methods of rice cultivation, and by including them as partners in farmer-participatory research (Seema and Nabi 2004; Paris, 2004).

- .iii. “Knowledge is power” but this has to be shared with women and not only with men. Although women’s roles are confined within the homestead, they should also be provided with technical knowledge and skills on crop management production such as raising seedlings, how to distinguish pests and diseases, fertilizer use, etc. When women were asked why they want to help their husbands in the fields their response was “We told our husbands that we should directly help them in cultivation of crops so that they have two hands to reap home harvests. Of course, still we need credit, but perhaps, not so much as we need knowledge”(Bayes, 2003)
- iv. Program that combine technical with organizational and leadership skills are effective in terms of building social capital. Thus, research and development workers should facilitate formation of womens’ groups to sustain adoption of different income generating activities. Programming efforts should be made towards empowering women and to facilitate how they can independently organize, manage and control their resources. One strategy would be to train some women as female agricultural extension worker at the local level by which improvement of homestead agriculture can be made through the village women.
- v. Policies/interventions should be differentiated to suit the needs of women from different socio-economic groups and social status (poor women from farming household, women from landless households, female headed households – widows, separated and *de facto* heads).
- vi. Government and NGO programs involving poor women in new activities such as road construction and maintenance, utilization of common property resources, leasing of fisheries, vaccination of livestock and poultry, and production and marketing of handicrafts should be expanded.
- vii. A policy is only good as its implementation. It is useful for an organization to complement a policy on gender with a gender strategy outlining the approach to implementation as well as a gender action plan. To implement the organization’s

commitment to gender equality, additional technical advice or expertise is needed. An effective strategy for mainstreaming is to ensure that gender sensitivity is included as a criteria in all development agenda. A strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be developed to ensure that all women benefit from various development efforts.

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